

cent, and, on dutiable items, 4.8 percent.

- From the end of the Civil War to 1900, Americans experienced persistent deflation. From 1865 to 1900, the overall drop in prices was 48 percent, or about 1.4 percent annually. The price of wheat dropped from \$2.16 a bushel to about 70 cents.

Now ponder the stories in those numbers.

Catholics have traditionally run the nation's largest sectarian school system; its decline suggests that, despite an apparent religious revival, the influence of religious schools is waning. The wheat and corn numbers indicate that technology (better seeds and more fertilizers, pesticides, and tractors) explains the 20th century's explo-

The new *Historical Statistics of the United States* is a five-volume monster, reflecting the wealth of data that have appeared since 1970.

sion of food production; previously, the expansion of farmland was the main cause. High tariffs in the 19th century contradict the notion that free trade aided America's early economic growth—

though it may aid economic growth now. Economists sometimes express fears about deflation, but modest deflation historically has not been crippling. The economy was four times larger in 1900 than in 1865.

This is the first edition of *Historical Statistics* since 1975. The Census Bureau, which had published the three earlier editions beginning in 1949, didn't receive sufficient congressional funding to continue doing so. In 1995, a group of scholars headed by economic historians (and wife and husband) Susan Carter and Richard Sutch of the University of California, Riverside, took up the job. In the end, 83 scholars contributed their tables and time in return for a copy of the finished product.

The new edition is a monster—five volumes, versus two for the 1975 edition. But that's understandable. By some estimates, more than four-fifths of the scholarly historical data series have appeared since 1970. New topics include poverty, American Indians, and the Confederacy. Many of

the statistics are eye opening. For example, from 1945 to 1995, the number of guns per capita nearly tripled, from 35 per 100 people to 92. But the share of homes with a gun decreased, from 49 percent in 1959 (the earliest year for which data are provided) to 40 percent in 1996. Apparently, guns are like TVs: People who have them have more of them.

Omissions? Well, yes. Public-opinion polling data are almost entirely absent. And there's nothing on sex (though statistics do exist). But the set's biggest defect is its price—\$825, rising to \$990 in November. Statistics fanatics will probably be able to find copies at many libraries. Universities and colleges likely will buy the online version for their faculties and students. Still, here are a couple of better ideas for the publisher: How about a one-volume abridged edition at \$75? Or a CD-ROM of the full set for \$250?

—Robert J. Samuelson

#### CONTEMPORARY AFFAIRS

## A House Divided

THOMAS MANN AND NORMAN ORNSTEIN, two of political Washington's most astute and prolific observers, have been involved with congressional reform efforts for decades. Now they have reached a point of utter dismay about Congress. *The Broken Branch* is a well-documented explanation of their frustration.

Mann, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, and Ornstein, a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, have two chief complaints: Members of Congress no longer have a sense of loyalty to the institution and its constitutional responsibilities, and majority-party leaders violate all standards of openness, fairness, and decency to ram through their agendas, with the result being shoddy, ideology-driven policies. Moderates in both parties, who might bridge the

### THE BROKEN BRANCH:

How Congress Is Failing America and How to Get It Back on Track.

By Thomas E. Mann and Norman J. Ornstein.  
Oxford Univ. Press.  
272 pp. \$26

partisan divide, are a vanishing breed because districts are growing more politically and ideologically homogeneous.

Unfortunately, the best the authors can do is recommend that America return Congress to Democratic control, though they admit that Democrats may not do things any differently. Notwithstanding this partisan solution, they concede that the legislative branch's current problems have their roots in 40 consecutive years of Democratic rule in the House, or at least in the last decade of that rule in the 1980s and early '90s, when "cracks in the institution began to show." But Mann and Ornstein leave no doubt that the open fissure today is primarily the responsibility of the Republican revolutionaries who came to power in 1995 under Newt Gingrich.

While in the minority, the authors contend, Gingrich and his firebrands launched an aggressive campaign to discredit Congress and its leaders as corrupt. Once in power, the Republicans ruled with near-total disregard for the Democratic minority's right to participate in the legislative process. And since the election of George W. Bush in 2000, they say, congressional Republicans have been little more than presidential handmaidens. Expressing shock that Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) announced proudly "that his primary responsibility . . . was to pass the president's legislative program," they take Republicans to task for distorting the Speaker's role as a neutral House officer, "above normal party politics." Yet in 1992, when Mann and Ornstein issued the first report of their Renewing Congress Project, they called for strengthening the Speaker's powers as party leader (though it's clear from the report that they were not contemplating a Republican Speaker).

The authors do not point to some past "golden age" as a model to resurrect; nor do they offer a yet-to-be-tried ideal that is in any way practicable. Committee government gave us arrogant and autocratic chairmen, while today's party government can produce haughty, hammer-handed leaders. Voters, Mann and Ornstein conclude, are the only ones who can mend the broken branch,

if they are given proper guidance from leaders "intent on shaking up the existing party system." In this regard, they foresee the possibility of a presidential candidate emerging in the next election, Teddy Roosevelt fashion, "to build a political center where none now exists." In a book devoted to restoring Congress's self-image and independence, a president seems a peculiar savior—especially a TR type. He barely got along with his more conservative party leaders in Congress and had a tendency to bypass them altogether, using executive orders.

In the end, *The Broken Branch* offers few realistic prescriptions for Congress other than closer adherence to the rules (known as "regular order"), greater institutional loyalty, and more deliberation. The authors are vague about how these admirable goals are to be achieved without replacing members of Congress with apolitical philosopher-kings or sending them all to a cultural re-education camp. They never grapple with the central reality of Congress: Its members are re-election seekers whose primary loyalty is not to their party, president, or institution, but to their constituents. Their parties keep them in office with generous servings of pork and plenty of time off to spend with their constituents—meaning less time in Washington for deliberation and oversight. Changing that reality would require voters to insist that their representatives ignore their parochial interests and work full time on the national interest. Now that would be a paradigm shift.

—Don Wolfensberger

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RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

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